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Guan

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(54) **DETERMINING STOWABILITY BASED ON ITEM-SIZE CATEGORIES**

(71) Applicant: **Amazon Technologies, Inc.**, Reno, NV (US)

(72) Inventor: **Danny Guan**, Seattle, WA (US)

(73) Assignee: **Amazon Technologies, Inc.**, Reno, NV (US)

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(51) **Int. Cl.**

G06F 7/00	(2006.01)
B65G 1/137	(2006.01)
G06Q 10/08	(2012.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC ***B65G 1/1371*** (2013.01); ***G06Q 10/087*** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

None

See application file for complete search history.

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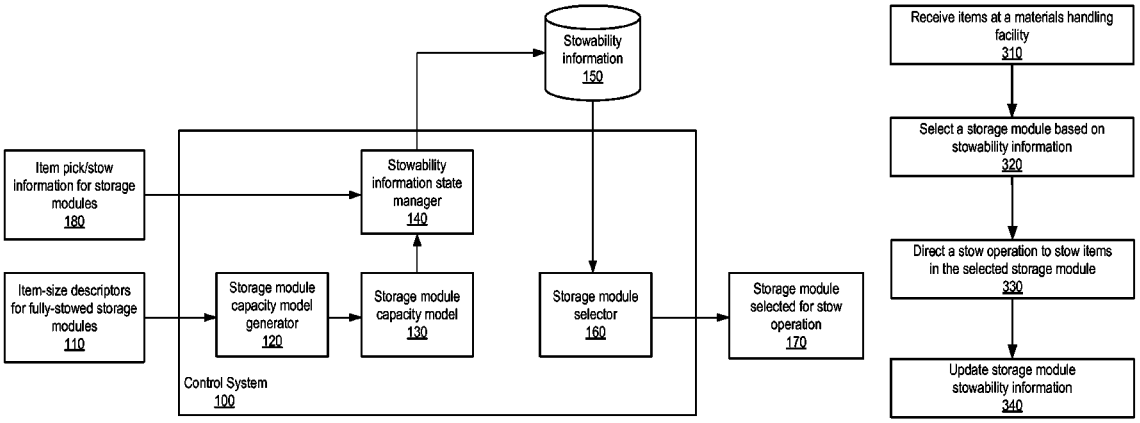
Primary Examiner — Yolanda Cumbess

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Robert C. Kowert; Meyertons, Hood, Kivlin, Kowert & Goetzel, P.C.

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Methods, systems and apparatus for determining stowability based on item-size categories are described. Embodiments may select a storage module for a stow operation based on accessing stowability information. Stowability information, in various embodiments may include stowability information for each storage module in a materials handling system. Stowability information may indicate a capacity to hold additional items in a storage module. The capacity may be determined according an item-size category descriptor, describing the quantity of items in each category of a storage module, and a storage module capacity module characterizing item descriptors of fully-stowed storage modules. In some embodiments the storage module capacity model is a function fitted to data points representing the values of item-size descriptors of fully-stowed storage modules. Embodiments may update the stowability information for a storage module in response to the removal of an item from the storage module.

20 Claims, 10 Drawing Sheets



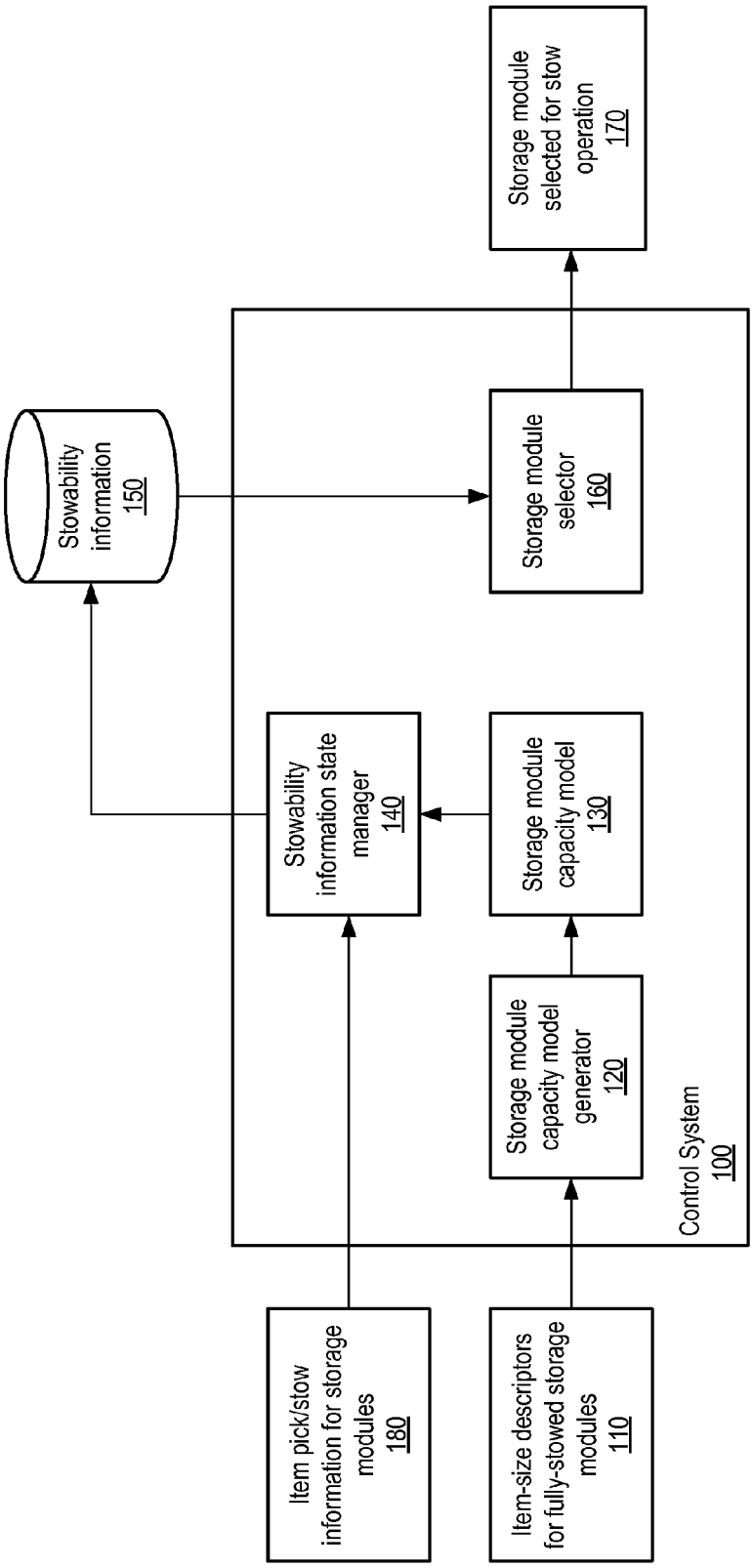

Storage module selected for stow operation 170
Stowability information 150
Storage module selector 160
Stowability information state manager 140
Storage module capacity model 130
Storage module capacity model generator 120
Control System 100
Item pick/stow information for storage modules 180
Item-size descriptors for fully-stowed storage modules 110

FIG. 1

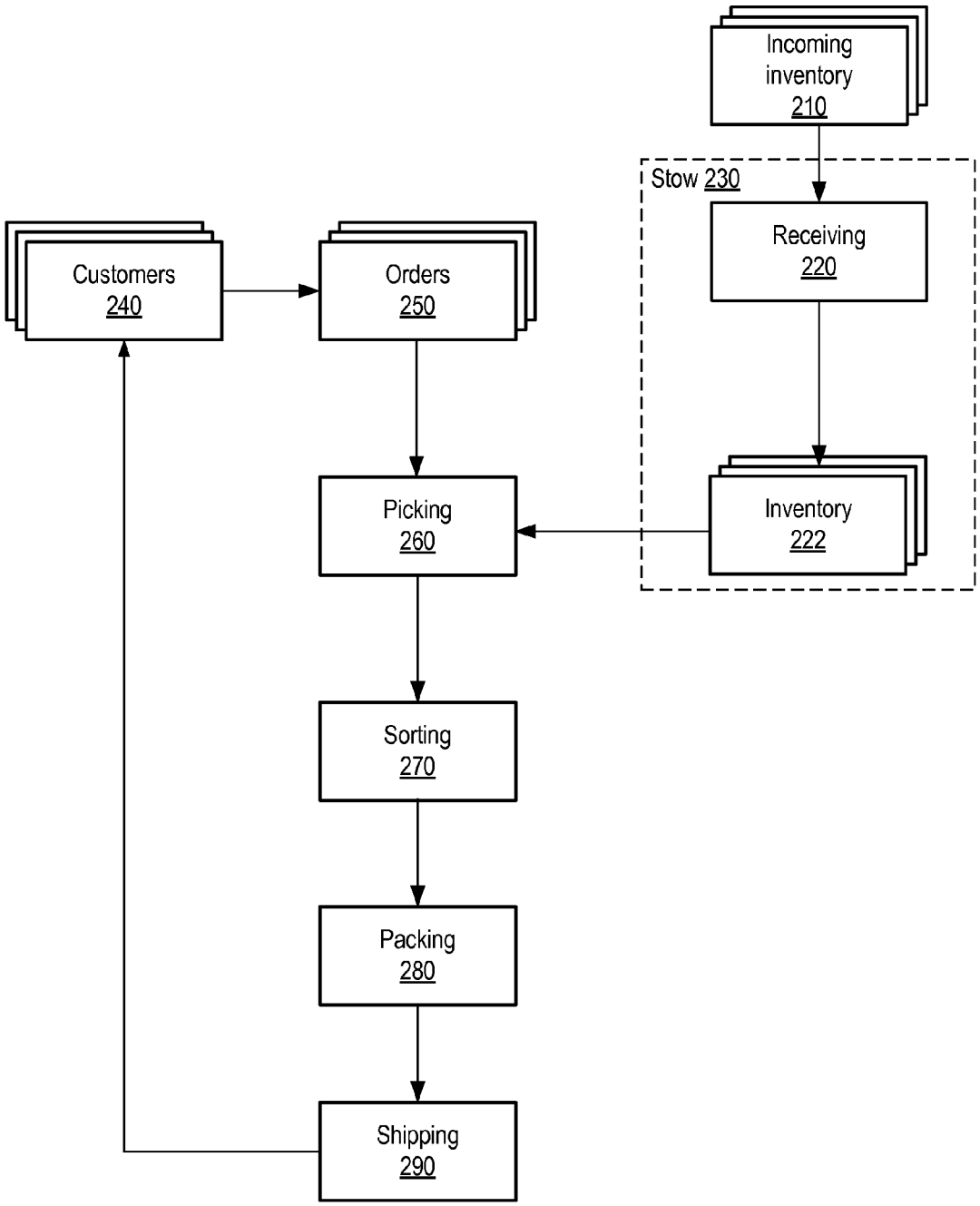

Incoming inventory 210
Stow 230
Receiving 220
Customers 240
Orders 250
Picking 260
Inventory 222
Sorting 270
Packing 280
Shipping 290

FIG. 2

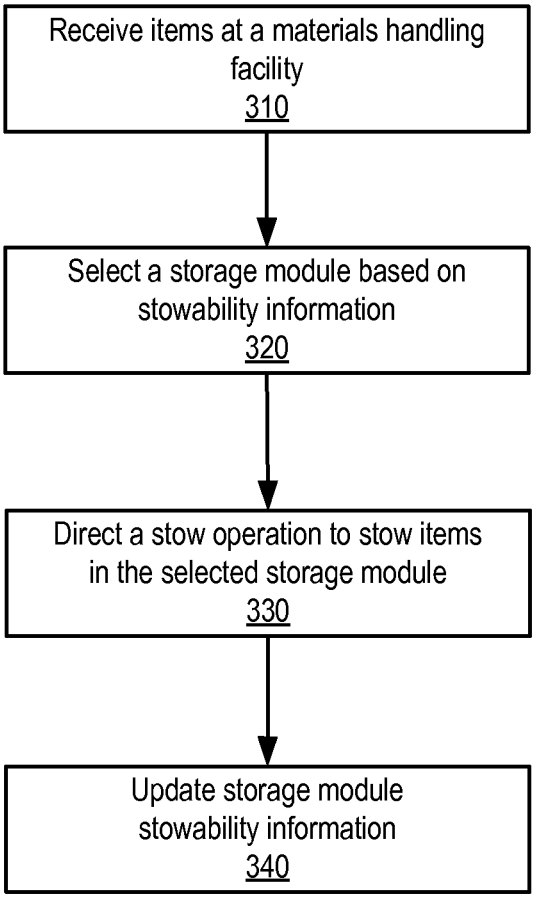

Receive items at a materials handling facility
310
Select a storage module based on stowability information
320
Direct a stow operation to stow items in the selected storage module
330
Update storage module stowability information
340

FIG. 3

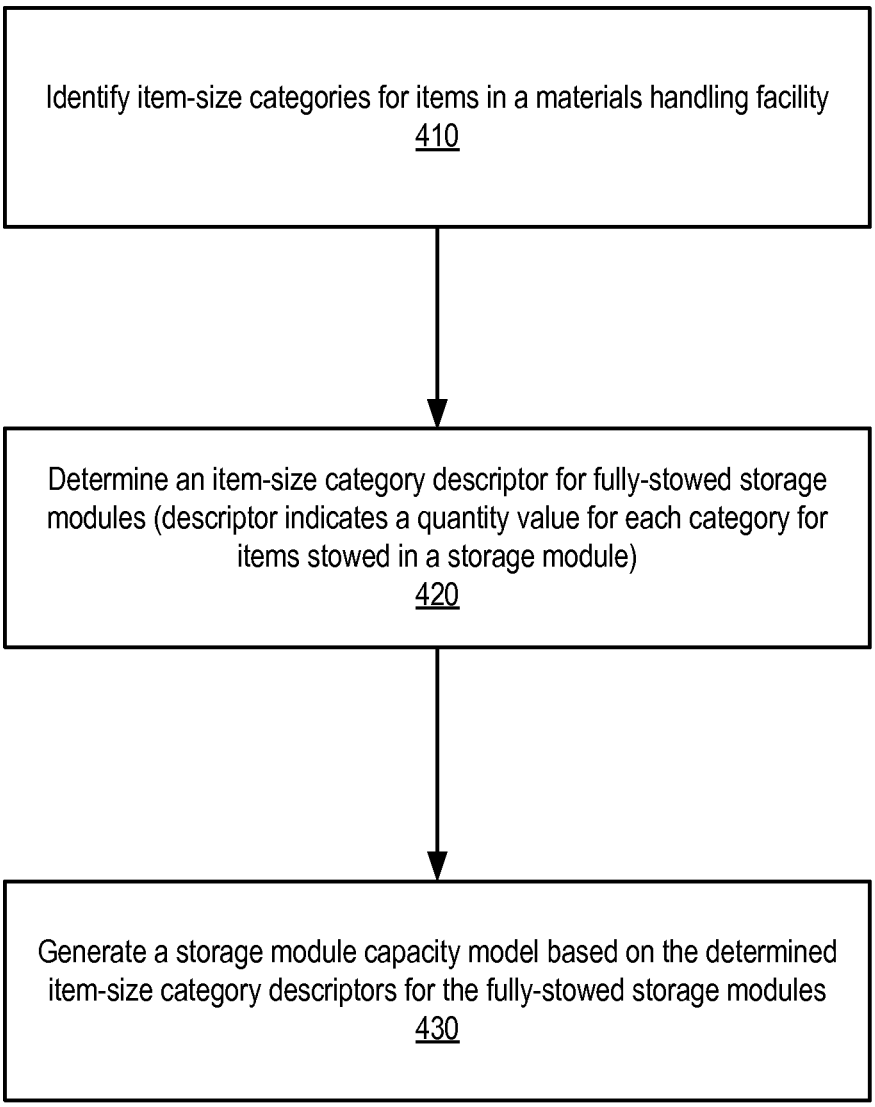

Identify item-size categories for items in a materials handling facility
410
Determine an item-size category descriptor for fully-stowed storage modules (descriptor indicates a quantity value for each category for items stowed in a storage module)
420
Generate a storage module capacity model based on the determined item-size category descriptors for the fully-stowed storage modules
430

FIG. 4

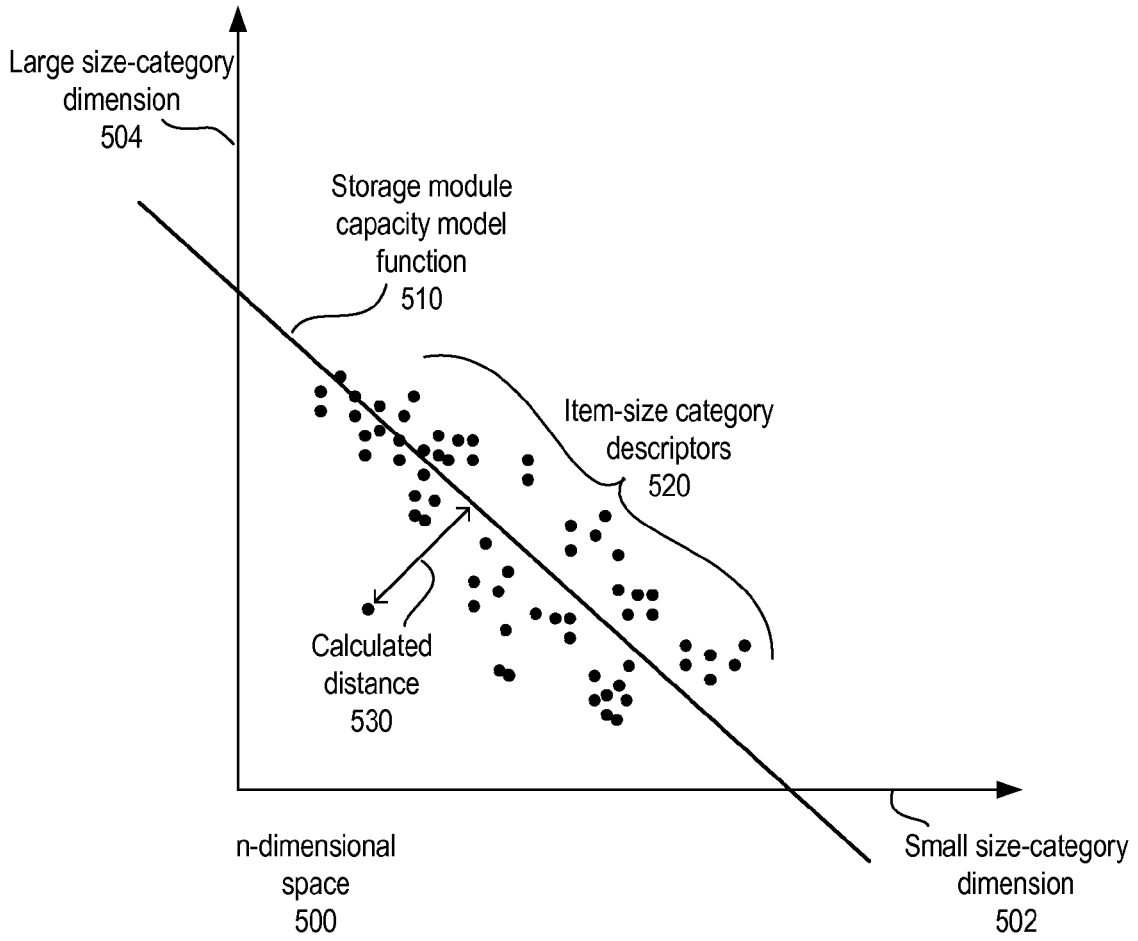

Large size-category dimension 504
Storage module capacity model function 510
Item-size category descriptors 520
Calculated distance 530
n-dimensional space 500
Small size-category dimension 502

FIG. 5

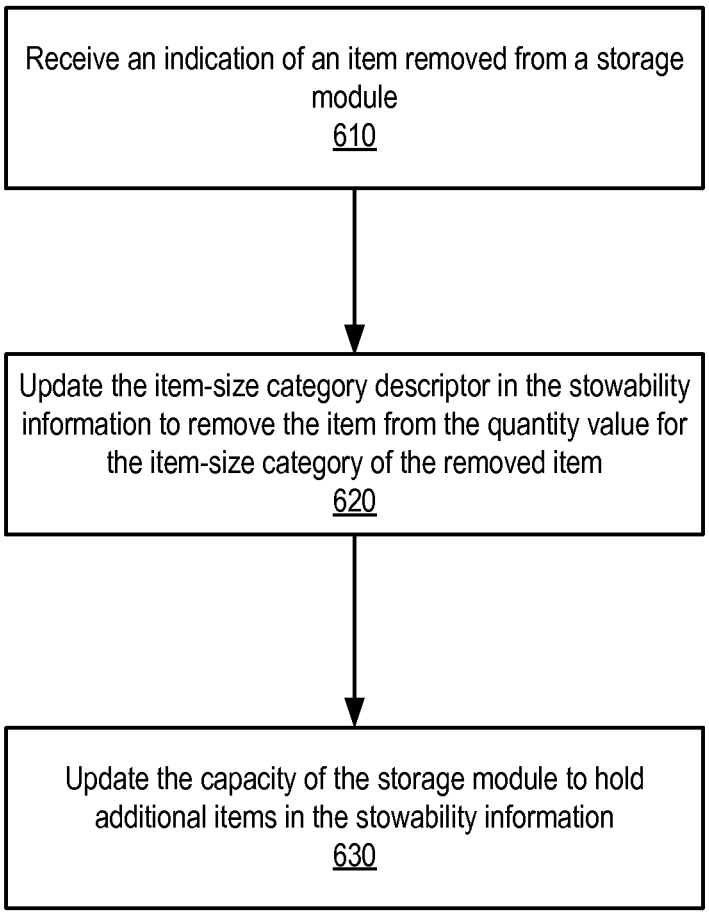

Receive an indication of an item removed from a storage module
610
Update the item-size category descriptor in the stowability information to remove the item from the quantity value for the item-size category of the removed item
620
Update the capacity of the storage module to hold additional items in the stowability information
630

FIG. 6

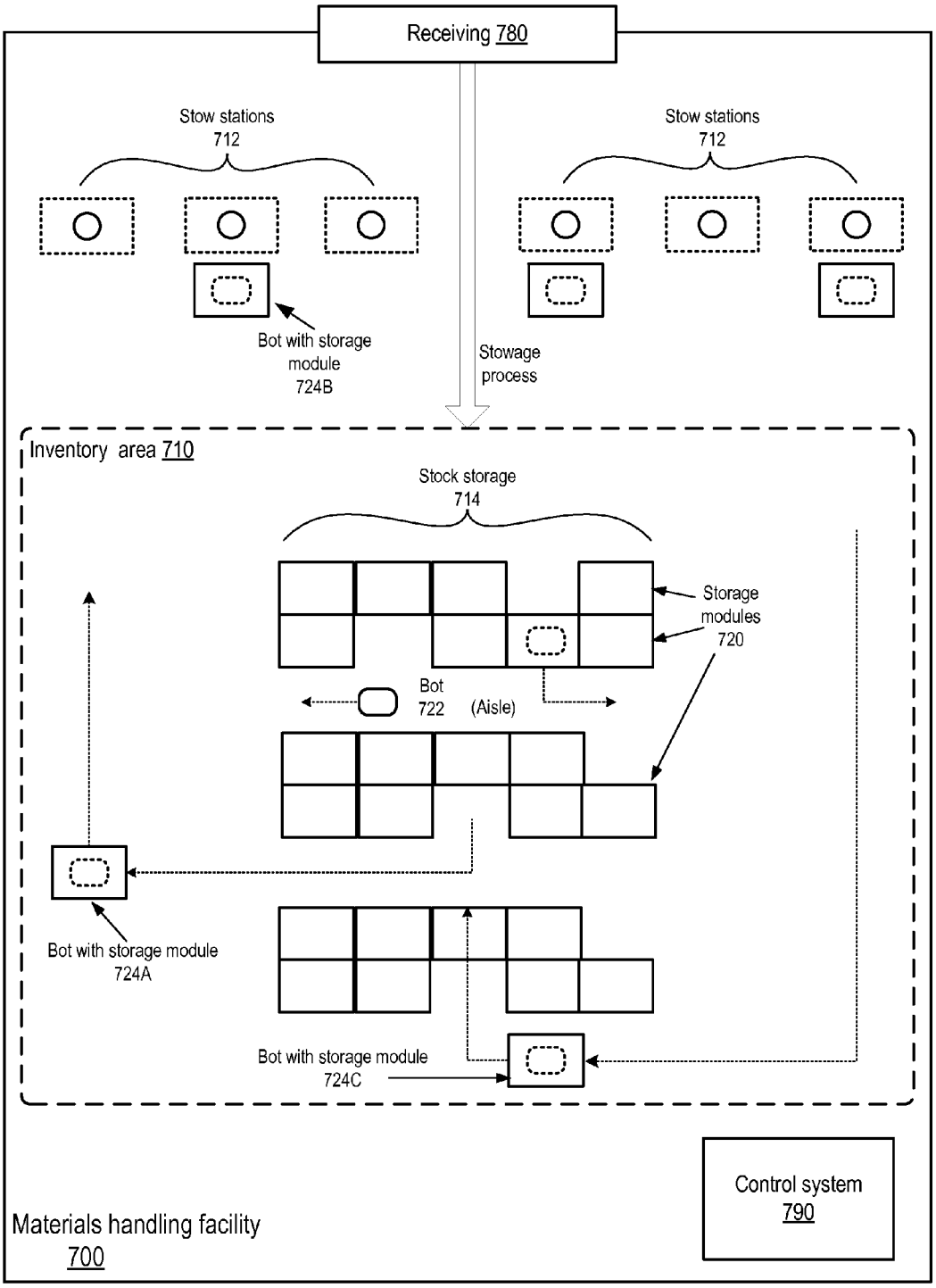

Receiving 780
Stow stations
712
Stow stations
712
Bot with storage
module
724B
Stowage
process
Inventory area 710
Stock storage
714
Storage
modules
720
Bot
722
(Aisle)
Bot with storage module
724A
Bot with storage module
724C
Control system
790
Materials handling facility
700

FIG. 7

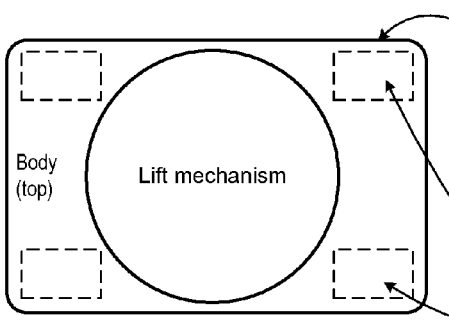


Figure 8A

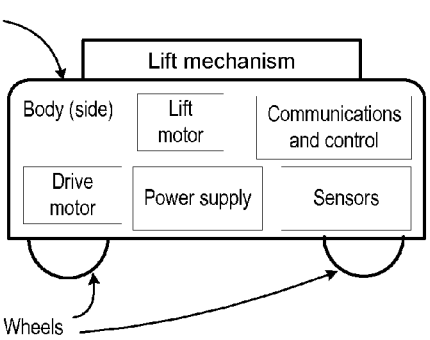


Figure 8B

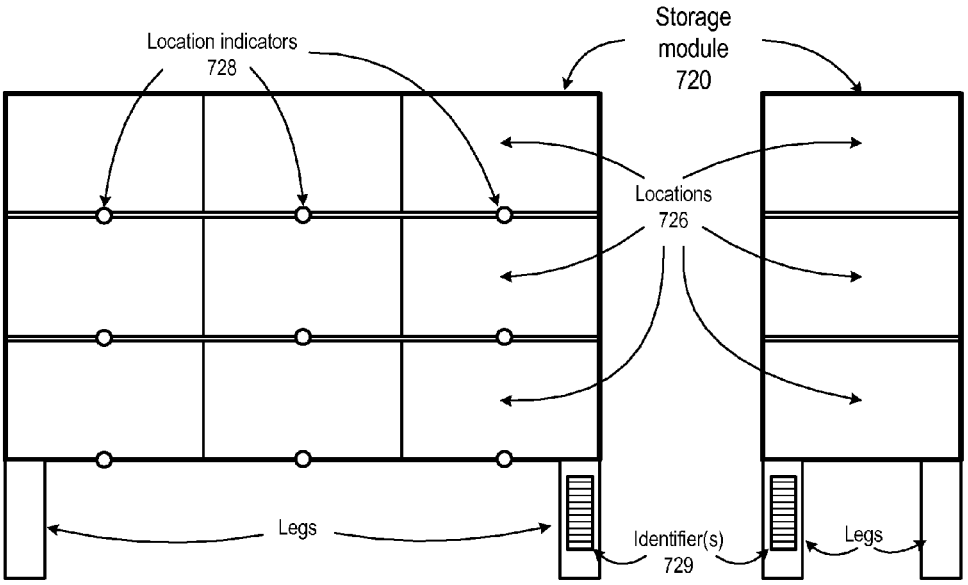


Figure 9A

Figure 9B

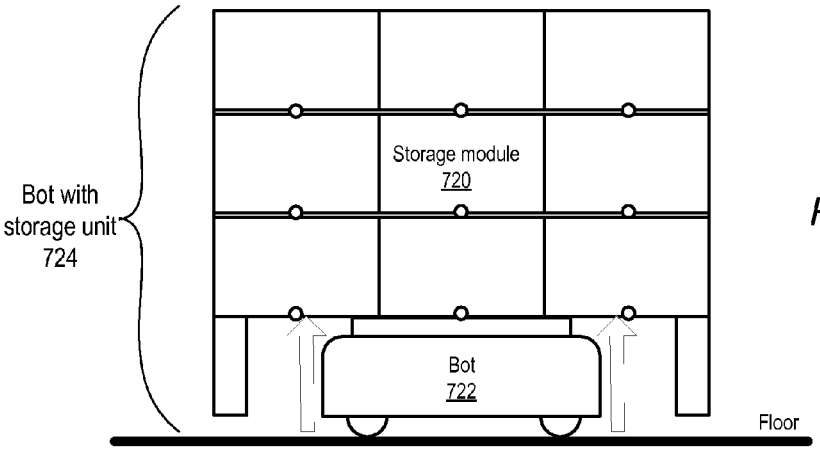


Figure 10

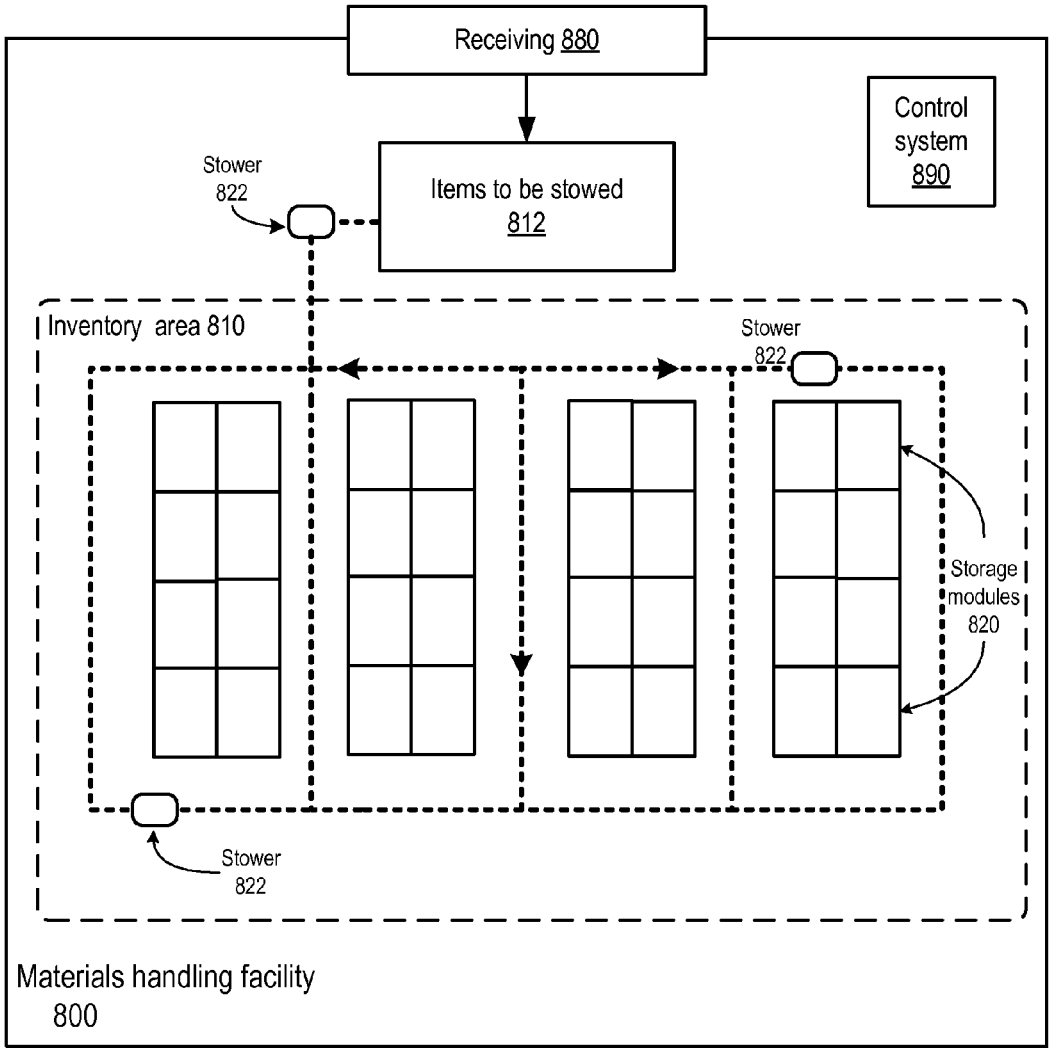

Receiving 880
Control system 890
Stower 822
Items to be stowed 812
Inventory area 810
Stower 822
Storage modules 820
Stower 822
Materials handling facility 800

FIG. 11

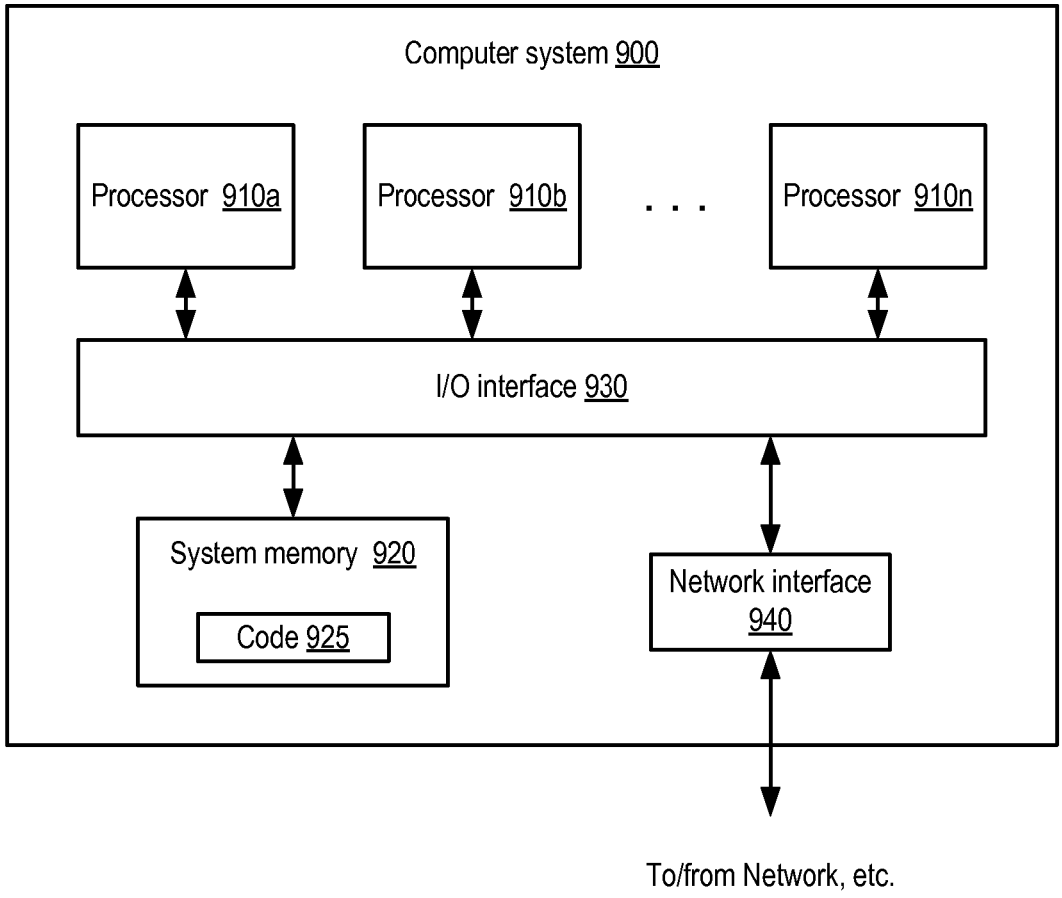

Computer system 900
Processor 910a
Processor 910b
. . .
Processor 910n
I/O interface 930
System memory 920
Code 925
Network interface 940
To/from Network, etc.

FIG. 12

DETERMINING STOWABILITY BASED ON ITEM-SIZE CATEGORIES

This application is a divisional of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/528,214, filed Jun. 20, 2012, now U.S. Pat. No. 8,825,197, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND

Stocking various items received at one or more distribution centers, fulfillment centers, cross-docking facilities, materials handling facilities or warehouses (which may collectively be referred to as materials handling facilities) is a time consuming process in a typical distribution system. Generally, the stocking process, or stowing process as it sometimes referred to, transports items from a receiving area and places the received items into an inventory storage area in a materials handling facility. Items are placed in storage units with enough storage capacity to hold the additional items. Determining which storage unit has capacity to hold additional items is conventionally determined manually. A human stocker must visually inspect the storage units to locate a particular storage unit with sufficient capacity for the items ready to be stocked. This process proves time intensive when stockers must search over large inventory areas.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** illustrates an example control system which may direct stow operations according to storage capacity, according to some embodiments.

FIG. **2** illustrates a logical representation or view of the operation of a materials handling facility, according to some embodiments.

FIG. **3** illustrates a high-level flowchart of a method to select a storage module based on stowability information, according to some embodiments.

FIG. **4** illustrates a high-level flowchart of a method to generate a storage module capacity module based on item-size category descriptors, according to some embodiments.

FIG. **5** illustrates an example of a storage module capacity model as a function fitted to describe item-size category descriptors, according to some embodiments.

FIG. **6** illustrates a high-level flowchart of a method to update the item-size category descriptor of a storage module in stowability information, according to some embodiments.

FIG. **7** illustrates an example of a physical layout of the inventory area of a materials handling facility in which mobile robotic devices may transport storage modules to stow stations, according to some embodiments.

FIGS. **8**A and **8**B illustrate views of an example mobile robotic device which may transport storage modules to stow stations, according to some embodiments.

FIGS. **9**A and **9**B illustrate views of an example storage module, according to some embodiments.

FIG. **10** illustrates an example of a mobile robotic device transporting a storage module, according to some embodiments.

FIG. **11** illustrates an example of a physical layout of the inventory area of a materials handling facility in which items may be transported to an inventory storage area, according to some embodiments.

FIG. **12** illustrates an example system, according to some embodiments.

While embodiments are described herein by way of example for several embodiments and illustrative drawings, those skilled in the art will recognize that embodiments are not limited to the embodiments or drawings described. It should be understood, that the drawings and detailed description thereto are not intended to limit embodiments to the particular form disclosed, but on the contrary, the intention is to cover all modifications, equivalents and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope as defined by the appended claims. The headings used herein are for organizational purposes only and are not meant to be used to limit the scope of the description or the claims. As used throughout this application, the word "may" is used in a permissive sense (i.e., meaning having the potential to), rather than the mandatory sense (i.e., meaning must). Similarly, the words "include," "including," and "includes" mean including, but not limited to.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS

In the following detailed description, numerous specific details are set forth to provide a thorough understanding of claimed subject matter. However, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that claimed subject matter may be practiced without these specific details. In other instances, methods, apparatus, or systems that would be known by one of ordinary skill have not been described in detail so as not to obscure claimed subject matter.

It will also be understood that, although the terms first, second, etc. may be used herein to describe various elements, these elements should not be limited by these terms. These terms are only used to distinguish one element from another. For example, a first contact could be termed a second contact, and, similarly, a second contact could be termed a first contact, without departing from the scope of the present invention. The first contact and the second contact are both contacts, but they are not the same contact.

The terminology used in the description of the invention herein is for the purpose of describing particular embodiments only and is not intended to be limiting of the invention. As used in the description of the invention and the appended claims, the singular forms "a", "an" and "the" are intended to include the plural forms as well, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise. It will also be understood that the term "and/or" as used herein refers to and encompasses any and all possible combinations of one or more of the associated listed items. It will be further understood that the terms "includes," "including," "comprises," and/or "comprising," when used in this specification, specify the presence of stated features, integers, steps, operations, elements, and/or components, but do not preclude the presence or addition of one or more other features, integers, steps, operations, elements, components, and/or groups thereof.

As used herein, the term "if" may be construed to mean "when" or "upon" or "in response to determining" or "in response to detecting," depending on the context. Similarly, the phrase "if it is determined" or "if [a stated condition or event] is detected" may be construed to mean "upon determining" or "in response to determining" or "upon detecting [the stated condition or event]" or "in response to detecting [the stated condition or event]," depending on the context.

Various embodiments of methods, systems, and apparatus for determining stowability based on item-size categories in materials handling facility are described. A materials handling facility, such as one or more distribution centers, fulfillment centers, cross-docking facilities, materials handling facilities or warehouses, may receive items for storage in an inventory area. The process of stocking items, oftentimes and hereinafter referred to as stowing items, into the inventory area may involve transporting received items and stowing

them in one of many storage modules located in the inventory area. Storage modules may already hold varying amounts of items. Additionally, storage modules may have different sizes or configurations which affect the storage capacity of a particular storage module to hold additional items. Selecting which storage module to stow items into may be accomplished by comparing the stowability, the capacity of a storage module to hold additional items, of the storage modules to identify storage modules with the most stowability.

In some embodiments, a control system may be implemented in a materials handling facility. When items received at the materials handling facility are ready to be stowed, the control system may direct a stow operation, performed by a human or robotic device, to stow the items into a selected storage module. The control system may select from among the many storage modules in a materials handling facility to stow items into by comparing the stowability of the storage modules and selecting a storage module with the most stowability. The control system may have access to the stowability information of the storage modules.

Stowability information accessible by a control system may include stowability information for each storage module in the materials handling facility. Stowability information for a storage module may include a capacity of the storage module to hold additional items. The capacity to hold additional items may be based on a storage module capacity model. The storage module capacity model may describe various configurations of items in fully-stowed storage modules. To determine the capacity to hold additional items for a storage module, various embodiments may apply the storage module capacity model to the items already held in the storage module, which are categorized into different item-size categories. Items may be identified as belonging to an item-size category according to the size information for the particular item.

In various embodiments, a control system may track the capacity of storage modules to hold additional items, updating the stowability information as items are picked, or removed, from the storage modules. The control system may also update the stowability information for a storage module as stow operations stowing items into the storage module are completed.

In some embodiments, a control system may direct mobile robotic devices (referred to herein as bots) to transport storage modules from the inventory area to stow stations. At the stow stations, human or automated stowers may perform stow operations, stowing received items into storage modules. When the storage module is fully stowed, a control system may direct a bot to return the storage module to the inventory area of the materials handling facility.

Embodiments of the method for determining stowability based on item-size categories may, for example, be implemented in a materials handling facility, such as depicted in FIG. **7**, including a stow process that employs stow stations. Bots may transport storage modules to stow stations where stowers may stow items into the storage modules. However, embodiments of the method for determining stowability based on item-size categories may be implemented in other materials handling facilities that employ other stow process, such as stow processes that direct human or robotic stowers to the storage modules in an inventory area, such as illustrated in FIG. **10**, to perform stow operations. More generally, embodiments of the method for determining stowability based on item-size categories may be implemented in any materials handling facility that stows received items into an inventory area.

Example Control System

Various embodiments may implement a method for determining stowability based on item-size categories in a control system in a materials handling facility. FIG. **1** illustrates an example control system which may implement a method for determining stowability based on item-size categories to direct stow operations, such as selecting a storage module with the most stowability, according to some embodiments. The control system depicted in FIG. **1** may be implemented on one system or computing device, such as system **900** described below with respect to FIG. **12**, or implemented across several computing systems or devices. In some embodiments, the control system in FIG. **1** may be part of a larger control system directing the various operations of a materials handling facility discussed below with regard to FIG. **2**.

A control system, such as control system **100**, may obtain information from various other systems or components in a materials handling facility. Communications between the control system and other systems may occur over a variety of standard or customized communication technologies, such as wired or wireless networks. For instance, control system **100** may receive item-size descriptors for fully stowed modules **110** from some measurement system or database. Embodiments of a control system **100** may obtain this information to direct stow operations.

In some embodiments, a control system may select a storage module from among the storage modules in a materials handling facility to stow items into based on stowability information for the storage modules. Storage module selector **160** may be configured to access stowability information **150**. Stowability information **150** may be a database or other variety of data storage which stores stowability information for the storage modules in a materials handling facility. As discussed above the stowability information for storage modules may be the capacity of storage modules to hold additional items. Stowability information **150** may located external to control system **100** or located internally (not depicted).

The capacity of storage modules to hold additional items as indicated in stowability information **150**, may be determined, tracked, or updated by a stowability information state manager **140** implementing various methods discussed below with regard to FIGS. **3** and **6**. To determine the stowability for storage modules, stowability information state manager **150** may be configured to apply a storage module capacity model **130** to the quantity of items held in a storage module, categorized into item-size categories. The quantity of categorized items held in a storage module may be described using an item-size category descriptor.

A storage module capacity model **130** may be generated by a control system's storage module capacity model generator **120**. Storage module capacity model generator **120** may be configured to generate one or more storage module capacity models for control system **100**. The storage module capacity model generator **120** may be configured to obtain item-size descriptors for fully-stowed modules to generate storage module capacity models, such as storage module capacity model **130**, implementing the various methods described below with regard to FIGS. **4** and **5**. In some embodiments, multiple storage module types may be used such that storage module capacity model generator **120** may generate storage module capacity models for each storage module type.

As items are picked from storage modules, described below at **260** in FIG. **2**, stowability information **150** may be updated by the stowability information state manager **140** to reflect the removal of the items from the inventory area. Particular methods and embodiments for updating the

stowability information **130** are discussed below with regard to FIGS. **3** and **6**. The stowability information state manager **140** may be configured to obtain item pick and stow information for storage modules **180**. For instance, a system or device external to the control system **100** may send pick information over wired or wireless networks to the control system. For example, in some embodiments as items are picked from storage modules or stowed in storage modules, an inventory management system may indicate over a wired network to the control system **100** that certain items have been picked or stowed or are scheduled to be picked or stowed in a particular storage module. A robotic or human picker or stower may operate some access device to indicate in the inventory management system picked or stowed items. In another example, a control system **100** may be configured to receive from a portable inventory reporting device reports of picked or stowed items. A portable inventory reporting device may be a mobile or portable, computing or electronic device capable of reporting picked or stowed items directly to a control system **100** or to an inventory management system which then reports the picked or stowed items to the control system **100**. Such a device may be a handheld electronic device that scans item barcodes or radio frequency identification (RFID) tags to indicate over a wireless network to the control system **100** that the scanned item has been picked from a particular storage module.

The updating and tracking provided by the stowability information state manger **140** to stowability information **150** may allow storage module selector **160** to select storage modules with the most stowability for a stow operation. Storage module selector **150** may be configured to implement the various methods and embodiments for selecting a storage module discussed below with regard to FIG. **3**. Control system **100** may direct a stow operation for stowing items on the select storage module **170**. Various communication methods and devices may be targeted for the directed stow operation. For example, in some embodiments a portable inventory reporting device, such as discussed above, may include a display screen that displays stow directions received over a wireless network from the control system for received items. The portable inventory reporting device may display stow directions for one or more items to be stowed in a selected storage module. In another example, some embodiments may employ one or more stow stations where items received at the materials handling facility may be stowed into a storage module. In at least some embodiments, a control system **100** may direct a bot over a wireless network to transport the selected storage module **170** from an inventory area to a stow station. Upon completion of the stow operation, the control system **100** may direct a bot to transport the storage module **170** back to the inventory area. A control system **100** may direct a stow operation for stowing items in a selected storage module to various other devices, such as display device viewable by human stowers.

Overview of Materials Handling Facility Operation

In various embodiments a control system may be implemented in a materials handling facility. FIG. **2** illustrates a logical representation or view of the operation of a materials handling facility in which embodiments of methods, systems, and apparatus for determining stowability based on item-size categories may be implemented. For example, this Figure may illustrate an order fulfillment center of a product distributor. Multiple customers **240** may submit orders **250** to the product distributor, where each order **250** specifies one or more items from inventory **222** to be shipped to the customer that submitted the order. To fulfill the customers' orders **250**, the items specified in the orders **250** may be retrieved, or picked **260**, from inventory **222** (which may also be referred to as stock storage) in the materials handling facility. The picked items may be conveyed, by the conveyance mechanism to one or more stations in the materials handling facility for downstream processing, for example sorting **270** into their respective orders, packing **280**, and finally shipping **290** to the customers **240**.

A materials handling facility may also include a receiving **220** operation for receiving inventory items **210** from one or more sources (e.g., vendors) and for stowing the received items according to a stowing process **230** into item storage (inventory **222**). The receiving **220** operation may also receive and process returned purchased or rented items or orders from customers. At least some of these returned items are typically returned to inventory **222**.

In at least some embodiments, rather than stowing directly to inventory **222** as shown in FIG. **2**, received inventory may be delivered to one or more stowing stations (not shown). Under direction of a control system, such as described above with regard to FIG. **1**, storage modules may be automatically moved from inventory **222** to particular stowing stations, for example using the robotic devices. At the stowing station(s), the received inventory may be manually or automatically placed in locations on the storage modules under direction of the control system. The storage modules are then returned from the stowing station(s) to inventory **222**, for example using the robotic devices. In some embodiments, induction and stowing may be combined at one station so that individual items for orders can be inducted into the conveyance mechanism from storage modules for delivery to one or more downstream processing stations (e.g., sorting stations) and received items can be stowed to the same storage modules prior to the storage modules being returned to inventory **222**; storage modules may also be moved from inventory **222** to the induction/stowing station(s) specifically for stowing.

The various operations of a materials handling facility may be located in one building, or alternatively may be spread or subdivided across two or more buildings. In addition, a materials handling facility may include one or multiple levels or floors. For example, a materials handling facility that includes inventory **222** may include one, two, or more levels; in multi-level facilities, inventory **222** may be spread across two or more levels. The total floor space of a materials handling facility may be anywhere from tens of thousands of square feet to more than a million square feet, although embodiments may be implemented in smaller facilities.

Workflow for Selecting a Storage Module

Embodiments of determining stowability based on item-size categories may be implemented in a control system, such as described above with regard to FIG. **1**. A control system may select a storage module based on stowability information and direct performance of a stow operation for stowing items received at the materials handling facility into the selected storage module. FIG. **3** illustrates a high-level flowchart of a method to select a storage module based on stowability information, according to some embodiments.

Embodiments may receive items **310** at a materials handling facility as discussed above with regard to receiving **220** in FIG. **2**. Items may be received from various sources including manufacturers, other distributers, or from customers returning items. Received items may be placed into receiving and transported from receiving to the inventory area. In some embodiments, the received items may be transported to various stow stations in a stow area.

A control system, such as control system **100** in FIG. **1**, may select storage module out the multiple storage modules in the materials handling facility based on stowability infor-

mation **320**. A control system may be configured to access stowability information for the storage modules. The stowability information may be in a separate database or other data storage device, such as stowability information **150** described above in FIG. **1**, or as part of a larger database or system, such as an inventory management system. The stowability information for each storage module may indicate a capacity of the storage module to hold additional items. The capacity indicated may be a numeric value or percentage. The capacity of the storage module to hold additional items may be determined according to a storage module capacity model, such as a storage module capacity model **130** generated by storage capacity model generator **120** discussed above with regard to FIG. **1**, applied to an item-size category descriptor for items currently held in the storage module. An item-size category descriptor may include a quantity value for each different item-size category. Each quantity value may indicate a total quantity of items stored in the storage module categorized in one of many different item-size categories.

For example, an item-size category descriptor for a storage module may include 10 small item-size category items, 6 medium item-size category items, and 2 large item-size category items. The capacity to hold additional items for the storage unit may be determined by applying a storage module capacity model, such as a function that describes full capacity storage modules described below with regard to FIGS. **4** and **5**, to this information to determine the capacity of the storage module. If for example, 10, 6, and 2 were plotted in a space of three dimensions, with each dimension corresponding to small, medium, and large, the distance from the point at (10, 6, 2) to the model function may represent the space left for items that may be additionally stored in the storage module before it is fully-stowed. Thus, this distance may be used to indicate the capacity of the storage module to hold additional items. Various methods and embodiments for generating a storage module capacity module and determining the capacity of a storage module are discussed below with regard to FIGS. **4** and **5**.

A control system may select a storage module for a stow operation based on the accessed stowability information. In some embodiments, the control system may select the storage module having the most capacity to store additional items. For example, if the capacities for storage modules are indicated as numbers or percentages, a control system may select the storage module with the greatest indicated number or percentage. Embodiments may also base selection decisions on other information in addition to the accessed stowability information. For example, a control system may select a storage module with a capacity to hold additional items above a certain threshold and within a certain radius from a particular stow station.

Various embodiments may direct performance of a stow operation **330** stowing items received at the materials handling facility into the selected storage module. For example, a control system may display a message on a display device that a stower might read, or print out directions to a particular storage module where the stower, human or robotic, may stow items. Some embodiments may direct a bot to transport the selected storage unit to a stow station. At the stow station, received items may be stowed into the selected storage unit. Upon completion of the stow operation, some embodiments may direct a bot to transport the storage module back to the inventory area.

Some embodiments may track the capacity of the storage modules and update the stowability information for the storage module **340** upon completion of a stow operation stowing items into a storage module. In some embodiments the stowability information may be updated in response to stowing a single item into a storage module. In other embodiments, the stowability information may be updated upon an indication that the storage module currently being stowed is full. Updating the stowability information may include updating the quantity values of the item-size category descriptor to reflect the additionally stored items. The item-size category for items stowed in a storage module may be determined, for example by accessing item information in an item database, and the updating the quantity value for the item. For example, if a storage module had prior to a stow operation 1 small, 2 medium and 0 large items, and 4 medium items and 3 large items were determined to be stowed in the storage module after which the storage module was indicated full, the quantity values in the item-size category descriptor for the storage module would be 1 small, 6 medium, and 3 large items. Some embodiments may update the indicated capacity to hold additional items in the stowability information according to the various methods discussed below with regard to FIGS. **4** and **5**. In some embodiments an item database tracks the location of stowed items, and the item stowability information communicates with the item database to obtain the item-size category descriptor for a storage module and indicates the updated capacity according to the information obtained from the item database.

Workflow for Generating a Storage Module Capacity Model

A control system, such as discussed above with regard to FIG. **1** may implement various components to determine stowability based on item-size categories. In some embodiments, control system including storage module capacity model generator **120** may implement various methods to generate multiple storage module capacity models. FIG. **4** illustrates a high-level flowchart of a method to generate a storage module capacity module based on item-size category descriptors, according to some embodiments.

Various embodiments may identify an item-size category for each item **410** in a materials handling facility. These items may be still in receiving, such as discussed above with respect to receiving **220** in FIG. **2**, or may be currently stored in the inventory area in various storage modules. Multiple item-size categories may exist and use descriptive labels, such as small, medium, and large. However, non-descriptive labels, such as category **1**, category **2**, and category **3** may be used. The number of item-size categories may not be limited, and therefore the number of item-size categories may be optimized according to the sizes or types of items received at the materials handling facility. For example, if a materials handling facility specialized in distributing bed mattresses, the number of item-size categories may be 4, for twin, full, queen and king size mattresses. If in another example, a materials handling facility carried a wide range of items, the item-size categories may be less optimized and more descriptive, such as small, medium, large, and extra-large. The item-size category for each item may be determined according to the size information for the item. Each item-size category may be defined as a range. Each range may be defined as a range for a size dimension, such as small is described by a range of item width between 1 and 6 inches, or defined as a range in terms of space, such as small items are from 1 to 10 cubic inches. In various embodiments the boundaries between item-size categories may be adjacent to one another, such as small 1 to 5, medium 6 to 10, and larger 11 to 20, or leave gaps, such as small is 1 to 4, medium 6 to 10, and large 12 to 20. In some embodiments item size information may be inconsistent and the same type of item may be categorized into a different item-size category. For example, the size information for a bag may be measured without any packing for the bag. If then

another bag of the same type of bag is measured in a shipping box, then the same bag may be in two different item-size categories. Various methods and techniques for sorting items into item-size categories may be implemented which are well-known to those of ordinary skill in the art in addition to the examples above. Therefore, none of the above examples are intended to be limiting.

Size information for items may be obtained from various sources. Some size information for items may be obtained from the manufacturer or distributer who shipped the item to the materials handling facility. Size information may be obtained from an item database or item, or inventory, management system, storing item size information according to each uniquely identified item. For example, when an item is received at a materials handling facility the item size information may be obtained from an item database via a globally unique identifier for the item in the database. Size information may also be obtained by measuring items received at a materials handling facility, such as by measuring the dimensions of an item, e.g., using an optical item dimension scanner (e.g., a CUBISCAN system), or other measurement tool or technique.

Embodiments may then determine an item-size category descriptor for fully-stowed storage modules **420** in a materials handling facility. As discussed above the item an item-size category descriptor may be represented as several values corresponding to the quantity of items in an item-size category stored in a storage module. Fully-stowed storage modules may be indicated to a control system by an external database, such as an inventory management system, or be indicated as fully-stowed in stowability information, such as stowability information **150** in FIG. **1**. Fully-stowed storage modules may also be identified as modules that have completed a stow operation and are returned to the inventory area. For fully-stowed storage modules in a materials handling facility, a control system may access stowability information or an inventory management system to determine the quantity value of items in each item-size category in the full capacity storage modules. The item-size category descriptor representing these values may be a data structure or format that represents both quantities and types of item-size categories. In some embodiments, the item-size category descriptor is stored as a data point in n-dimensional space, where each dimension corresponds to an item-size category. For example, if item-size categories are small, medium, large, and extra-large, the item-size category descriptor would be a data point in 4-dimensional space for a given storage module with 1 small, 1 medium, 1 large, and 1 extra-large item represented as (1, 1, 1, 1).

Embodiments may generate a storage module capacity model **430** based on the item-size category descriptors for the fully-stowed storage modules. A storage module capacity model may characterize item-size category descriptors for storage modules at fully-stowed with items. In some embodiments, each item-size category descriptor for the fully-stowed storage modules may be mapped as data points in an n-dimensional space. Each dimension of the n-dimensional space may correspond to a different item-size category. Each quantity value of the item-size category descriptor may map to a different dimension on the n-dimensional space. A function may be fitted to the data points in the n-dimensional space to describe the item-size category descriptors for the full capacity storage modules. In some embodiments, several storage module types may exist for storage modules. Storage module capacity models may be generated according to the discussed methods for each storage module type.

FIG. **5** illustrates an example of a storage module capacity model represented as a function fitted to describe item-size category descriptors, according to some embodiments. In the Figure, the n-dimensional space **500** includes two dimensions, a small size-category dimension **502** corresponding to a small item-size category and a large size-category dimension **504** corresponding to a large item-size category. The item-size category descriptors **520** are mapped according to the number of small and large item-size category items in each fully-stowed storage module. Using the data points, various well-known techniques, such as linear or non-linear regression techniques, may be used to fit a function to the data points, such as the storage module capacity model function **510**. Note that the drawing in FIG. **5** appears to display a line in the space for the storage module capacity model function **510**. However, as the number of dimensions may be up to n values, a function model may be a line, plane, or multi-dimensional shape, and as such the model depicted at **510** in FIG. **5** is not intended to be limiting.

In some embodiments, to determine the capacity of the storage module to hold additional items the item-size category descriptors for items currently held in the storage module may be represented as values. Each value corresponds to a different item-size category, and each value indicates a total quantity of items stored in the storage module categorized in one of the item-size categories. For example, if a storage module has an item descriptor that represents the 3 small, 4 medium, and 5 large items, the values may be 3, 4, and 5. Embodiments may then map the values to an n-dimensional space with each dimension of the n-dimensional space corresponding to an item-size category. For example, in FIG. **5** the item size category descriptors **520** may be the values of the item-size category mapped to the dimensions small, medium, and large. Embodiments may then calculate a distance from the location of the values in the n-dimensional space to the function for the storage module capacity model. FIG. **5** illustrates the calculated distance **530** between a location of a value in the n-dimensional space **500** and the storage module capacity model function **510**. Note that the drawing in FIG. **5** appears to display a line in the space for the storage module capacity model function **510**. However, as the number of dimensions may be up to n values, a function model may be a line, plane, or shape, and as such the model depicted at **510** in FIG. **5** is not intended to be limiting. Calculating the distance between the value and the function may be implemented using various well-known techniques, such as calculating the difference between the values represented as a vector and the function. Numerous other techniques may be employed to determine the distance and the above example is not intended to be limiting.

Workflow of Updating Stowability Information

As various items are stowed or picked from storage modules in an inventory area in a materials handling facility, various embodiments of a control system, such as control system **100** described with regard to FIG. **1**, may track the capacity of the storage modules in a materials handling facility to hold additional items. FIG. **6** illustrates a high-level flowchart of a method to update the item-size category descriptor of a storage module in stowability information, according to some embodiments.

Various embodiments may receive an indication of an item being removed from a storage module **610**, such as the item pick information **180** described above with regard to FIG. **1**. As discussed above, various systems and devices may communicate with a control system, such as over wired or wireless networks, to indicate an item's removal from a storage module. For example, a portable inventory reporting device,

such as portable inventory reporting device discussed above with regard to FIG. **1** may send a wireless indication to a control system of an item being picked from a storage module. Likewise, an inventory management system, such as an inventory management system discussed above in FIG. **1**, may also communicate an indication of an item's removal to a control system.

In response to receiving an indication of an item being removed from storage module, a control system, such as using a stowability information state manager **140** described above in FIG. **1**, may update the item-size category descriptor in the stowability information for the storage module to remove the item from the quantity value for the item-size category of the removed item **620**. Embodiments may determine the item-size category for the removed item. This determination may be made using item size information, such as discussed above at **410** in FIG. **4**, to identify an item-size category for the removed item. Once the item-size category of the removed item is determined, the control system may update the quantity value of the item-size category descriptor for the storage module from which the item was removed.

In some embodiments, the capacity of the storage module to hold additional items in the stowability information may be updated **630** also by the control system, such as a control system implementing a stowability information state manager **140** in FIG. **1**. The update may occur in response to an item's removal from a storage module, applying the storage module capacity model to the updated item-size category descriptor. In other embodiments, the update may occur when a control system accesses the stowability information.

Example Layout of a Materials Handling Facility with Mobile Robotic Devices

FIG. **7** illustrates an example of a physical layout of the stow area of a materials handling facility in which mobile robotic devices may transport storage modules to stow stations, according to some embodiments. The number, relative size, and arrangement of elements in FIG. **7** are given by way of example, and are not intended to be limiting. Materials handling facility **700** may include one or more inventory **710** areas. Each inventory **710** area includes a stock storage **714** that includes a plurality of storage modules **720**. Each storage module **720** may include one or more locations (e.g., slots, shelves, partitions, bins, etc.) in which units of items are stowed. Storage modules **720** may have several storage module types. For example, a storage module type may be a bay on a four-side storage unit. Several storage modules may be located on a storage unit or apparatus. Each storage module **720** may stow one or more different types of items.

Each inventory **710** area also includes one or more stow stations **712**. In this example, inventory **710** area includes six stow stations **712**. At any one time, one or more bots **722** may be moving storage modules **720** from stock storage **714** area to stow stations **712** to stow items in storage modules, under direction of control system **790**. In at least some embodiments, to move a storage module **720**, a bot **722** may move under the storage module **720**, lift the storage module **720**, and then move the storage module **720** to a destination (e.g., a particular stow station **712**) under direction of control system **790**. FIG. **7** shows several examples of bots with storage modules **724**. For example, FIG. **7** shows bot with storage module **724**A moving from stock storage **714** towards a stow station **712**, bot with storage module **724**B at a stow station **712**, and bot with storage module **724**C moving from a stow station **712**B to stock storage **714**. FIGS. **8**A and **8**B illustrate an example bot, FIGS. **9**A and **9**B illustrate an example storage module, and FIG. **10** illustrates an example bot with storage module.

A stow area may also include one or more receiving **780** operations or areas for receiving shipments of stock from various vendors. Received stock may be placed into stock storage **714** in one or more inventory **750** areas. The receiving **780** operation may also receive and process returned, purchased, or rented items from customers. At least some of these items may be restocked into an inventory **750** area.

In at least some embodiments, rather than stowing directly to stock storage received inventory may be delivered to one or more stowing stations **712**. Under direction of the control system **790**, storage modules **720** may be automatically moved from stock storage **714** to particular stowing stations, for example using the bots **722**. At the stowing station(s), the received inventory may be manually or automatically placed in locations on the storage modules **720** under direction of the control system **790**. The storage modules **714** are returned from the stowing station(s) to stock storage **714**, for example using the bots **722**. In some embodiments, induction and stowing may be combined at one or more of the stow stations **712** so that individual items for orders can be inducted into a conveyance mechanism (not pictured) from storage modules **720** for delivery to one or more downstream processing stations (e.g., sorting stations) and received items can be stowed to the same storage modules **720** prior to the storage modules **720** being returned to stock storage **714**. Storage modules **714** may also be moved from stock storage **714** to the induction/stowing station(s) specifically for stowing.

The various areas, operations and stations of materials handling facility **700** may be located in one building or facility, or alternatively may be spread or subdivided across two or more buildings or facilities. In addition, materials handling facility **700** may include one or multiple levels or floors. For example, materials handling facility **700** may include one, two, or more levels; in multi-level stow areas **700**, a separate inventory **710** area may located on each of two or more levels, and various downstream processing stations may be located on one or more of the levels.

The configuration of materials handling facility **700**, including the configuration of inventory **710** area, as shown in FIG. **7** is given by way of example, and is not intended to be limiting. Other configurations for materials handling facility **700**, and inventory **710** area are possible and contemplated.

In addition, a materials handling facility may include two or more inventory **710** areas, which may be similarly or differently configured. A materials handling facility may, for example, have two or more levels, with a separate inventory **710** area located on at least two different levels. In these configurations, bots **722** may be directed, either automatically by control system **790** or by operator input to the control system **790**, from one inventory **710** area to another inventory **710** area. For example when a first inventory **710** area has high demand and needs more bots **722**, while a second inventory **710** area has less demand and can spare at least one bot **722**, at least one bot **722** may be directed from the second inventory **710** area to the first inventory **710** area. In multi-level facilities, lifts may be provided to convey bots **722** between levels as necessary or desired. A bot **722** may be remotely directed, by the control system **790**, to go to a lift, get on the lift, get off the lift at the appropriate level, and proceed to an inventory **710** area on the level. In at least some embodiments, as an alternative to directing the movement of bots **722** between inventory **710** areas to meet demand needs, control system **790** may instead direct stows from one inventory **710** area to another inventory **710** area or areas. For example, if the control system **790** detects that a particular inventory **710** area is falling behind, the control system **790** may shift some of the stow load to another inventory area **710**.

In some implementations, an inventory **710** area may be subdivided into zones, for example a zone of the stock storage area corresponding to (and nearby) each stow station, and one or more bots may be assigned to operate within each zone. In these implementations, for example to handle differences in demand, bots **722** may be directed, either automatically by control system **790** or by operator input to the control system **790**, from one zone to another zone in the inventory **710** area, or alternatively stow load may be directed from one zone to another zone in an inventory **710** area.

FIGS. **8**A and **8**B illustrate an example mobile robotic device (bot) that may be used in at least some embodiments. The shape, size, and configuration of the bot **722** and its components are examples for illustrative purposes, and are not intended to be limiting. FIG. **8**A shows a top view of the example bot **722**, and FIG. **8**B shows a side view of the bot **722**. A bot **722** may include at least a body or chassis, a lift mechanism located on top of the body for lifting storage modules **720**, and wheels (or other mechanisms such as tracks or treads) located underneath the body. While FIG. **8**A shows a circular lift mechanism, the lift mechanism may be other shapes. While FIGS. **8**A and **8**B show a bot **722** with four wheels, a bot **722** may include more or fewer wheels, for example two rows of three wheels, three rows with four wheels in each row, and so on. Also, different wheels may have different functions; for example, one or more wheels may be drive wheels, one or more wheels may be steerable wheels, and one or more wheels may just be free-rolling wheels. In some implementations, a bot **722** may be configured to raise and lower the body relative to the wheels. In some implementations, a bot may not include a separate lift mechanism as shown in FIGS. **8**A and **8**B for lifting storage modules **720**; instead, raising and lowering the body relative to the wheels may act to lift and lower storage modules **720**.

A bot **722** may be short enough, with the lift mechanism lowered, to fit under storage modules **720**. In some embodiments, the bot **722** may be short enough to pass under other components of the materials handling facility. As shown in FIG. **8**B, a bot **722** may include at least one drive motor for driving the wheels, at least one lift motor for raising and lowering the lift mechanism, communications and control components that may communicate (e.g., via wireless communications) with a control system **790** or other external devices and control motions and actions of the bot **722** under direction of the control system **790** and/or autonomously, and one or more sensors that may, for example sense the current location of the bot **722** in the materials handling facility and/or the location of the bot **722** relative to other external objects, devices, or stations in the materials handling facility. Communications and control components may include at least one computing device similar in architecture to the example computer system **900** illustrated in FIG. **12**, which may store computer code and data for controlling the bot **722**. The sensors may include optical sensors, tactile sensors, and/or other types of sensors. A bot **722** may also include at least one power supply and/or connection for connecting to an external power source. In some embodiments, the power supply may be or may include a rechargeable battery. A bot **722** may include other components, for example video cameras, audible alarms, external lights, access panels, external controls such as on/off buttons, antennas, and Radio Frequency Identifier (RFID) devices. For example, a bot **722** may include an RFID tag that uniquely identifies the bot **722** in the materials handling facility. However, other techniques or devices may be used to uniquely identify bots **722** in the materials handling facility.

A materials handling facility may include sensors, RFID readers, or other devices that enable the control system **790** to determine, and track the location of specific bots **722** in the facility via wired or wireless communications. A materials handling facility may also include transmitters or similar devices that enable the control system **290** to direct the motions and actions of specific bots **722**. In some implementations, a materials handling facility may include guide strips, tracks, or other techniques for guiding the movements of the bots **722** in the facility, either autonomously or under control of the control system **790**. For example, the aisles in the inventory **710** area illustrated in FIG. **7** may have guide strips embedded in or attached to the surface of the floor for guiding the bots **722**.

In some implementations, a materials handling facility may use two or more different types or configurations of bots **722** for moving different types or configurations of storage modules.

FIGS. **9**A and **9**B illustrate an example storage module that may be used in at least some embodiments. FIG. **9**A shows a front view of an example storage module **720**, and FIG. **9**B shows a side view of the example storage module **720** of FIG. **9**A. A storage module **720** may include one or more locations **726** into which units of items may be stowed. In some implementations, only one type of item is stowed in each location **726**. However, implementations are possible in which two or more different types of items may be stowed in a location **726**. FIG. **9**A shows an example configuration for a storage module **720** that may be used in some implementations, and is not intended to be limiting. Storage modules **720** may have different configurations and storage module types, and storage modules **720** with different configurations may be used together in an implementation of an inventory **710** area. In various implementations, storage modules **720** may have different numbers of locations, and/or different sizes of locations. In some implementations, a storage module **720** may have two or more different sizes of locations to accommodate more or fewer items and/or larger or smaller items. In some embodiments two or more storage modules may be combined into a storage unit. When storage module is selected for a stow operation, the entire storage unit may be transported.

As shown in FIGS. **9**A and **9**B, a storage module **720** may include legs that raise the bottom shelf of the unit **720** high enough so that a bot **722** can fit under the unit **720**. This example shows four legs arranged at the corners of the unit **720**; however, other numbers or configurations of legs are possible.

Each storage module **720** may include at least one indicator **728** associated with each location **726** of the storage module **720**. An indicator **728** may, for example, be used to indicate, at a stow station **712**, that a unit of an item is to be stowed into **726** under control of control system **790**. The indicator **728** may be a light, an audio signal, or some other mechanism or combination of mechanisms capable of conveying audible, visual, and/or other information to a human operator. As an alternative, or in addition, to indicators **728** physically located proximate to locations of storage module **720**, textual and/or graphical directions may be displayed on a monitor of a computer, hand-held device, etc., or printed to paper output for operator(s) at a stow station **712**.

Each storage module **720** may include at least one identifier **729**, which may be attached to or integrated in a leg (as shown) or attached to or integrated in some other portion or surface of the unit **720**. The identifier **729** may uniquely identify the storage module **720** in an inventory **710** area, or in the materials handling facility. For example, a storage module **720** may include an RFID tag that uniquely identifies the

storage module **720** in the materials handling facility. However, other techniques or devices may be used to uniquely identify storage modules **720**.

FIG. **10** illustrates an example bot with a storage module, according to at least some embodiments. A bot **722**, under control of control system **790**, may move underneath a storage module **790**, and may raise the lift mechanism to lift the storage module **720** off the floor. The bot **722** may then, under control of the control system and/or autonomously, move the storage module **720** to another location, for example to a specific stow station **712** of an inventory **710** area. A bot **722** with a storage module lifted, as illustrated in FIG. **10**, may be referred to as a bot with storage module **724**.

Example Layout of Materials Handling Facility for Transporting Items to Inventory Area

FIG. **8** illustrates an example of a physical layout of the stow area of a materials handling facility in which items may be transported to an inventory storage area, according to some embodiments. Materials handling facility **800** is implementing a stow process in a materials handling facility, such as described above with regard to FIG. **2** above. Items may be received at a materials handling facility **800** in receiving **880**. Some items may be identified as ready to be stowed **812**. Control system **890** may be a control system, such as described above with regard to FIG. **1**. Inventory area **810** may include one or more storage modules **820**, such as the storage modules described above with regard to FIGS. **7** through **10**. Control system **890** may direct a stower **822** to transport a received item **812** to a selected storage module and perform a stow operation stowing the item into the selected storage module, according to the methods outlined in FIGS. **3** through **6** above. Control system **890** may communicate stow directions to stowers **822** using various methods, including but not limited to paper print out, electronic display, a portable inventory reporting device, such as described above with regard to FIG. **1**. Communications may travel on a wired or wireless network.

A stower **822** may be a human or robotic operator capable of stowing one or more items into a storage module **820**. Control system may **890** direct stowers **822** to multiple selected storage modules **820**. In some embodiments, stowers **822** may indicate to the control system **890** when items are stowed in a storage module **820**, such that control system **890** may update the stowability information for the storage module **820**. A control system **890** may direct stow operations for multiple inventory areas **810** and balance the stow load of received items by selecting storage modules **820** in different inventory areas **810**.

The various areas, operations of stow area **800** may be located in one building or facility, or alternatively may be spread or subdivided across two or more buildings or facilities. In addition, stow area **800** may include one or multiple levels or floors. For example, a stow area **800** may include one, two, or more levels; in multi-level stow areas **800**, a separate inventory **810** area may located on each of two or more levels, and various downstream processing stations may be located on one or more of the levels.

The configuration of materials handling facility **800**, including the configuration of inventory **810** area, as shown in FIG. **8** is given by way of example, and is not intended to be limiting. Other configurations for materials handling facility **800**, and inventory area **810** are possible and contemplated.

Example System

In at least some embodiments, a system that implements a control system that implements determining stowability based on item-size categories may include a general-purpose computer system that includes or is configured to access one or more computer-accessible media, such as computer system **900** illustrated in FIG. **12**. In the illustrated embodiment, computer system **900** includes one or more processors **910** coupled to a system memory **920** via an input/output (I/O) interface **930**. Computer system **900** further includes a network interface **940** coupled to I/O interface **930**

In various embodiments, computer system **900** may be a uniprocessor system including one processor **910**, or a multiprocessor system including several processors **910** (e.g., two, four, eight, or another suitable number). Processors **910** may be any suitable processors capable of executing instructions. For example, in various embodiments, processors **910** may be general-purpose or embedded processors implementing any of a variety of instruction set architectures (ISAs), such as the x**86**, PowerPC, SPARC, or MIPS ISAs, or any other suitable ISA. In multiprocessor systems, each of processors **910** may commonly, but not necessarily, implement the same ISA.

System memory **920** may be configured to store instructions and data accessible by processor(s) **910**. In various embodiments, system memory **920** may be implemented using any suitable memory technology, such as static random access memory (SRAM), synchronous dynamic RAM (SDRAM), nonvolatile/Flash-type memory, or any other type of memory. In the illustrated embodiment, program instructions and data implementing desired functions, such as those methods and techniques described above for a control system in a robotic induction technique and/or in a non-linear, unit-level materials handling system that implements the robotic induction technique, are shown stored within system memory **920** as code **925** and data **926**.

In at least some embodiments, I/O interface **930** may be configured to coordinate I/O traffic between processor **910**, system memory **920**, and any peripheral devices in the device, including network interface **940** or other peripheral interfaces. In some embodiments, I/O interface **930** may perform any necessary protocol, timing or other data transformations to convert data signals from one component (e.g., system memory **920**) into a format suitable for use by another component (e.g., processor **910**). In some embodiments, I/O interface **930** may include support for devices attached through various types of peripheral buses, such as a variant of the Peripheral Component Interconnect (PCI) bus standard or the Universal Serial Bus (USB) standard, for example. In some embodiments, the function of I/O interface **930** may be split into two or more separate components, such as a north bridge and a south bridge, for example. Also, in some embodiments some or all of the functionality of I/O interface **930**, such as an interface to system memory **920**, may be incorporated directly into processor **910**.

Network interface **940** may be configured to allow data to be exchanged between computer system **900** and other devices attached to a network, such as other computer systems, communications devices, control mechanisms, readers, scanners and so on that are components of a control system in a materials handling system that implements the robotic induction technique. The communications channels may include, but are not limited to conventional and mobile telephone and text messaging communications channels. Network interface **940** may commonly support one or more wireless networking protocols (e.g., Wi-Fi/IEEE 802.11, or another wireless networking standard). However, in various embodiments, network interface **940** may support communication via any suitable wired or wireless general data networks, such as other types of Ethernet network, for example. Additionally, network interface **940** may support communication via telecommunications/telephony networks such as

analog voice networks or digital fiber communications networks, via storage area networks such as Fibre Channel SANs, or via any other suitable type of network and/or protocol.

In some embodiments, system memory **920** may be one embodiment of a computer-accessible medium configured to store program instructions and data as described above for FIGS. **1** through **11** for implementing a control system for, or possibly other components of, control system that implements determining stowability based on item-size categories. However, in other embodiments, program instructions and/or data may be received, sent or stored upon different types of computer-accessible media. Generally speaking, a computer-accessible medium may include storage media or memory media such as magnetic or optical media, e.g., disk or DVD/CD coupled to computer system **900** via I/O interface **930**. A computer-accessible medium may also include any volatile or non-volatile media such as RAM (e.g. SDRAM, DDR SDRAM, RDRAM, SRAM, etc.), ROM, etc, that may be included in some embodiments of computer system **900** as system memory **920** or another type of memory. Further, a computer-accessible medium may include transmission media or signals such as electrical, electromagnetic, or digital signals, conveyed via a communication medium such as a network and/or a wireless link, such as may be implemented via network interface **940**.

Various embodiments may further include receiving, sending or storing instructions and/or data implemented in accordance with the foregoing description upon a computer-accessible medium. Generally speaking, a computer-accessible medium may include storage media or memory media such as magnetic or optical media, e.g., disk or DVD/CD-ROM, volatile or non-volatile media such as RAM (e.g. SDRAM, DDR, RDRAM, SRAM, etc.), ROM, etc., as well as transmission media or signals such as electrical, electromagnetic, or digital signals, conveyed via a communication medium such as network and/or a wireless link.

The various methods as illustrated in the Figures and described herein represent exemplary embodiments of methods. The methods may be implemented in software, hardware, or a combination thereof. The order of method may be changed, and various elements may be added, reordered, combined, omitted, modified, etc.

Various modifications and changes may be made as would be obvious to a person skilled in the art having the benefit of this disclosure. It is intended that the invention embrace all such modifications and changes and, accordingly, the above description to be regarded in an illustrative rather than a restrictive sense.

What is claimed is:

1. A method, comprising:

performing, by one or more computing devices:

identifying an item-size category for each of a plurality of items in a materials handling facility, wherein said item-size category for each of the plurality of items is determined from among a plurality of different item-size categories according to size information for the item;

determining an item-size category descriptor for each of a plurality of storage modules, wherein the plurality of storage modules are fully-stowed storage modules, wherein the item-size category descriptor includes a quantity value for each different item-size category, and each quantity value indicates a total quantity of items stored in the fully-stowed storage module categorized in a respective one of the different item-size categories; and

generating a storage module capacity model that characterizes item-size category descriptors for fully-stowed storage modules.

2. The method of claim **1**, further comprising, for each of multiple storage modules at a materials handling facility, tracking a capacity for the storage module to hold additional items according to the generated storage module capacity model, wherein said tracking comprises updating the capacity in response to an item being picked from the storage module.

3. The method of claim **2**, further comprising selecting a storage module for a stow operation from among the multiple storage modules according to the capacities of the plurality of storage modules to hold additional items.

4. The method of claim **3**, further comprising directing performance of the stow operation for stowing items received at the materials handling facility into the selected storage module.

5. The method of claim **4**, further comprising determining an updated capacity for the selected storage module upon completion of the stow operation.

6. The method of claim **1**, wherein said generating the storage module capacity model comprises:

mapping each item-size category descriptor as data points in an n-dimensional space, wherein each dimension of the n-dimensional space corresponds to a respective one of the different item-size categories, and each quantity value of the item-size category descriptor maps to a different dimension on the n-dimensional space;

fitting a function to the data points in the n-dimensional space to describe the determined item-size category descriptors for the plurality of storage modules.

7. The method of claim **6**, further comprising determining a capacity for a storage module to hold additional items according to the generated storage module capacity model, comprising:

calculating a distance from an item-size descriptor of the storage module to the function for the storage module capacity model, wherein the distance provides a measure of the capacity of the storage module to hold additional items.

8. The method of claim **1**, wherein the plurality of storage modules comprises a plurality of different storage module types, the method further comprising generating a different storage module capacity model for each different storage module type.

9. A system, comprising:

a plurality of storage modules at a material handling facility; and

a control system, implemented by one or more computers, configured to:

identify an item-size category for each of a plurality of items in the materials handling facility, wherein said item-size category for each of the plurality of items is determined from among a plurality of different item-size categories according to size information for the item;

determine an item-size category descriptor for each of the plurality of storage modules, wherein the plurality of storage modules are fully-stowed storage modules, wherein the item-size category descriptor includes a quantity value for each different item-size category, and each quantity value indicates a total quantity of items stored in the fully-stowed storage module categorized in a respective one of the different item-size categories; and

generate a storage module capacity model that characterizes item-size category descriptors for fully-stowed storage modules.

10. The system of claim **9**, wherein the control system is further configured to:

for each of the multiple storage modules at the materials handling facility, track a capacity for the storage module to hold additional items according to the generated storage module capacity model, wherein said track a capacity comprises updating the capacity in response to an item being picked from the storage module.

11. The system of claim **10**, wherein the control system is further configured to:

select a storage module for a stow operation from among the multiple storage modules according to the capacities of the plurality of storage modules to hold additional items.

12. The system of claim **11**, wherein the control system is further configured to:

direct performance of the stow operation for stowing items received at the materials handling facility into the selected storage module; and

determine an updated capacity for the selected storage module upon completion of the stow operation.

13. The system of claim **9**, wherein to generate the storage module capacity module, the control system is further configured to:

map each item-size category descriptor as data points in an n-dimensional space, wherein each dimension of the n-dimensional space corresponds to a respective one of the different item-size categories, and each quantity value of the item-size category descriptor maps to a different dimension on the n-dimensional space; and

fit a function to the data points in the n-dimensional space to describe the determined item-size category descriptors for the plurality of storage modules.

14. The system of claim **13**, wherein the control system is further configured to determine a capacity for a storage module of the plurality of storage modules to hold additional items according to the generated storage module capacity module, wherein to determine a capacity for a storage module to hold additional items according to the generated storage module capacity module, the control system is further configured to:

calculate a distance from an item-size descriptor of the storage module to the function for the storage module capacity model, wherein the distance provides a measure of the capacity of the storage module to hold additional items.

15. A non-transitory, computer-readable storage medium storing program instructions computer-executable to implement a control system configured to:

identify an item-size category for each of a plurality of items in a materials handling facility, wherein said item-size category for each of the plurality of items is determined from among a plurality of different item-size categories according to size information for the item;

determine an item-size category descriptor for each of a plurality of storage modules, wherein the plurality of storage modules are fully-stowed storage modules, wherein the item-size category descriptor includes a quantity value for each different item-size category, and each quantity value indicates a total quantity of items stored in the fully-stowed storage module categorized in a respective one of the different item-size categories; and

generate a storage module capacity model that characterizes item-size category descriptors for fully-stowed storage modules.

16. The non-transitory, computer-readable storage medium of claim **15**, wherein the control system is further configured to:

for each of the multiple storage modules at the materials handling facility, track a capacity for the storage module to hold additional items according to the generated storage module capacity model, wherein said track a capacity comprises updating the capacity in response to an item being picked from the storage module.

17. The non-transitory, computer-readable storage medium of claim **16**, wherein the control system is further configured to:

select a storage module for a stow operation from among the multiple storage modules according to the capacities of the plurality of storage modules to hold additional items.

18. The non-transitory, computer-readable storage medium of claim **17**, wherein the control system is further configured to:

direct performance of the stow operation for stowing items received at the materials handling facility into the selected storage module; and

determine an updated capacity for the selected storage module upon completion of the stow operation.

19. The non-transitory, computer-readable storage medium of claim **15**, wherein to generate the storage module capacity model, the control system is further configured to:

map each item-size category descriptor as data points in an n-dimensional space, wherein each dimension of the n-dimensional space corresponds to a respective one of the different item-size categories, and each quantity value of the item-size category descriptor maps to a different dimension on the n-dimensional space; and

fit a function to the data points in the n-dimensional space to describe the determined item-size category descriptors for the plurality of storage modules.

20. The non-transitory, computer-readable storage medium of claim **19**, wherein the control system is further configured to determine a capacity for a storage module of the plurality of storage modules to hold additional items according to the generated storage module capacity module, wherein to determine a capacity for a storage module to hold additional items according to the generated storage module capacity module, the control system is further configured to:

calculate a distance from an item-size descriptor of the storage module to the function for the storage module capacity model, wherein the distance provides a measure of the capacity of the storage module to hold additional items.

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